

Report of the Mission Study Team for Eagle River Presbyterian Church, Alaska



Eagle River Presbyterian Church

“In the heart of the community, with the community at heart”

July 20, 2025

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Message from the Mission Study Team

This Mission Study Team was created by the Session of Eagle River Presbyterian Church during the May 2024 Session Meeting. A slate of candidates was presented to the Session for their approval and consisted of Kim Arlington, Matthew Hobbie, Brent Koenen, John Malecha and Diane Walters.

The purpose of the Mission Study Team was to start the process of hiring a permanent, called pastor upon the retirement of long-time pastor Rev. Piper Cartland. The team was guided in this process by interim pastor Rev. Blake Severson to help the team discern the overall mission of the church and its hopes and aspirations for the future by talking to members of the congregation through questionnaires, Town Hall meetings, and a survey. The idea is to find a permanent pastor who would come alongside the church as it worked toward meeting these goals and objectives.

The team started meeting in June 2024 and met roughly every other week throughout the fall and winter of 2024 and weekly starting in January 2025. Guided by Pastor Severson, the team was encouraged to ask itself and the congregation who they thought the church was in the past, who it is now, and who it aspires to be in the future.

To do this, the team handed out three questionnaires to the congregation in the fall, each with one specific question, held two town hall meetings—one in October 2024 and one in February 2025, and emailed everyone a 50-question survey, also in February 2025. The questions were designed to elicit responses that reflected the congregation's views of the church in the past, present, and its hopes for the future. In addition, the team paid two demographic research companies to analyze the demographics of Eagle River and the surrounding communities within a 10-mile radius and a 20-minute driving time of the church. Demographics requested included age, race, ethnicity, income and housing type, marital status and education.

The team also looked at trends in the church, going back to 2009, including membership, weekly attendance, financial contributions and other sources of income, and expenditures.

When suggestions for new initiatives were proposed as part of the responses, those ideas were presented to Session for implementation now rather than wait for a new pastor to be called. One example of this was the establishment of a prayer ministry and creation of a prayer room.

History of Eagle River Presbyterian Church

Eagle River Presbyterian Church (ERPC) was established in 1984 as a New Church Development, responding to the desire of local residents for a Presbyterian congregation. Supported by the Yukon Presbytery, Rev. Jim Scott served as Organizing Pastor (1984-1985), leading outreach in the Chugiak-Eagle River community. A steering committee, including Jim Arlington, Gary Clouse, Cheryl Gorton, Cyril Kiehl, Chuck Morgan, and Sevard Wagenius, guided the church's formation.

Worship services began on September 16, 1984, at Joy Lutheran Church. By February 1985, the congregation grew to nearly 100 members, prompting a move to Eagle River Church of the Nazarene. ERPC was officially chartered on March 8, 1985, at First Baptist Church of Eagle River, where the first elders and deacons were elected. Following Rev. Scott's departure in June 1985, Rev. Ben Walters served as interim pastor for three months.

The Pastor Nominating Committee called Rev. Ed Hamilton and Rev. Myrlene Hamilton as co-pastors (1986-1988). During their tenure, ERPC relocated to the Eagle River Shopping Center and then the Parkgate Building. A significant step towards a permanent home was the acquisition of 5.8 acres on Eagle River Road in December 1985, though subdivision restrictions initially delayed construction.

After the Hamiltons' departure in August 1988, Rev. Ralph Weeks (pastor emeritus of Trinity Presbyterian Church in Anchorage) filled the pulpit until Rev. John K. Wilson arrived as Stated Supply Pastor (1988-1989).

Growth and Community Focus (1989-1997)

In August 1989, Rev. Ken Smith became pastor, emphasizing youth ministry and leading to the growth of youth groups and a successful Vacation Bible School. A key development was the purchase of a former pool hall in downtown Eagle River in 1990. The building was remodeled to include the sanctuary, several classrooms, a kitchen, church offices, commercial rental space and rooms for several community user groups. The building was dedicated on March 24, 1991. By the end of 1992, increased attendance led to the refurbishment of the worship area and a need for more educational space. ERPC established Discovery Daycare, a licensed childcare center, and remodeled daycare facilities. Space was also provided for Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) meetings. Christian Education classes continued to grow in 1993.

During 1994 ERPC focused on missions. ERPC transitioned from a mission-receiving to a mission-giving church through evangelism, supporting a Seminary intern, and participating in Habitat for Humanity. Youth groups engaged in mission trips. A Building Use Committee was formed. Donations of stained-glass windows and the installation of a new cross enhanced the church's building.

In 1995 ERPC celebrated our 10th anniversary with the return of founding pastors Rev. and Mrs. Jim Scott. A toddler facility at Discovery Daycare was expanded. The congregation celebrated Pastor Ken Smith's 40th ordination anniversary. The adjacent parking lot was acquired with congregational support.

Throughout 1996 the congregation emphasized meeting individual and community needs through Stephen Ministry, the Mary Magdalene project, support for Discovery Daycare, and addressing food insecurity. Financial challenges arose due to a Daycare management transition. In 1997, ERPC continued its community mission, housing the food pantry, supporting Daycare and Stephen Ministry, and collaborating with other organizations. Rev. Ken Smith retired in the spring after 43 years of ministry, including eight at ERPC. Rev. Arlys Wilbur served as interim pastor.

Transitions and New Leadership (1998-2002)

Our congregation experienced the following transition and leadership changes between 1998 and 2002:

- 1998 brought the call of Rev. Dr. Dean Knapp as pastor, beginning in August. Rev. Arlys Wilbur moved to another interim position, and Laurie Blair became church secretary.
- 1999 featured an international focus with Pastor Knapp studying in Israel and visitors from Russian Orthodox churches in the Murmansk region.
- In 2000, Discovery Learning Center closed. The Food Pantry was relocated to provide more storage and facilities for Star Group AA. Dr. Knapp resigned, effective December 31, 2000, leading to a search for an interim pastor.
- 2001 began with congregational challenges. Rev. Dick Oman temporarily filled the pulpit before Rev. Bob Palmer, an Intentional Interim Pastor, arrived in April with his wife Bobbe. Rev. Palmer guided the church through a healing process. By year's end, the church met its budget and purchased new hymnals.
- 2002 marked a renewal with the call of Rev. Piper Bush Cartland as pastor, installed on September 29. Interim Pastor Bob Palmer's preparation facilitated a smooth transition. The year saw a renewed emphasis on mission, facility improvements, and membership growth. Mortgage refinancing and increased giving nearly eliminated the church's deficit.

Growth, Outreach, and Building Initiatives (2003-2008)

In 2003, ERPC leaders and Rev. Cartland examined the church's mission. Positive steps led to increased attendance, particularly in children's programs. The church's finances improved, aided by the creation of an accounting technician position. ERPC hosted the fall biannual meeting of the Presbytery of the Yukon.

During 2004 ERPC saw continued growth, the addition of pews, and the hiring of a new choir director. ERPC hosted Father Leonid from Russia and sent a delegation to Murmansk. An Eagle Scout project improved landscaping. Despite a reduced budget, the mission committee expanded outreach. Planning for a new sanctuary began in December.

During 2005 the congregation began a partnership with Alongside Ministries. The congregation celebrated its 20th anniversary, and we welcomed back former pastors. Active fellowship groups and a December prayer vigil enriched community life. ERPC participated in the Chamber of Commerce's Merry Merchant Munch.

The first quarter of 2006 focused on a Capital Campaign. Rev. Cartland served as Acting Head of Staff of the Presbytery. Three ERPC members attended the General Assembly. New women's and joint youth groups were formed. Technology was enhanced with the installation of an LCD projector.

Throughout 2007 ERPC conducted facility improvements, such as painting and new lighting. A nursery attendant was hired. An all-day Vacation Bible School was held. The Capital Campaign faced challenges. New Advent candles were purchased.

In 2008, new carpet and door trim were installed. ERPC hosted Connexions, a service for disabled adults. Rev. Cartland and others led Vacation Bible School in Savoonga, and ERPC welcomed Savoonga's new pastor. Elder Mary Ann Tipton and Rev. Cartland traveled to Savoonga for his ordination. Linda Homan stepped down as finance person.

Community Engagement and Adaptation (2009-2017)

ERPC had numerous community engagements and congregation adaptations between 2009 to 2017. Following are some of the interactions and changes during this period:

- 2009 saw ERPC continue its community service, hosting Connexions. The church's online presence expanded. Despite economic challenges, the budget was met.
- In 2010, ERPC's campus served numerous community groups. An Eagle Scout project created an accessibility ramp.
- 2011 involved updating membership rolls and replacing siding. Rev. Cartland was the Presbytery's commissioner to the General Assembly.
- 2012 saw various tenants use ERPC's space. The church sponsored a baseball team. An Eagle Scout project prepared frontage areas.
- In 2013, sod was installed. Tenant changes occurred. Children's Church time was adjusted. A new hymnal was purchased.
- 2014 brought new tenants and a new Fellowship Hall. ERPC supported the Kaktovik church and participated in local outreach. Support continued for a baseball team. A stored organ was put into use. Community outreach continued in 2015 with garden beds for the Food Pantry and a "free little library." Members assisted with church construction in Gambell. The loss of a tenant led to congregational support.
- 2016 marked the mortgage payoff. A new tenant, The Pain and Headache Center, arrived. The garden beds continued to support the Food Pantry.
- In 2017, administrative and music staff changes occurred. Community outreach continued, and the church ended the year financially positive, fundraising for a new organ.

Earthquake, Pandemic, and Transition (2018-2024)

From 2018 to 2024 our congregation experienced several significant events. Following are some of those events:

- In 2018, the church moved to one service at 10:00am. New music leadership arrived. Space was offered to a new group. The church hosted one of the biannual Presbytery meetings. On November 30 a 7.1 earthquake caused significant building damage.
- 2019 involved personnel changes. Earthquake repairs and renovations began.
- 2020 was dominated by the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to online worship. Repairs continued to the church building while we worshiped online, and a PPP grant provided assistance.
- 2021 saw a gradual return to in-person worship and the earthquake repairs were completed.
- 2022 marked a further return to regular activities. A delayed building re-dedication service was held, and Rev. Cartland announced her retirement for May 2023.
- In 2023, ERPC again hosted one of the biannual Presbytery meetings and celebrated Rev. Cartland's retirement. Rev. Blake Severson was hired as interim pastor. Facility improvements were made, and a new tenant arrived. Weekly coffee fellowship began.
- During 2024, ERPC continued its community support. A Prayer Ministry was initiated. New groups began meeting at ERPC. Regular expenses exceeded income, but savings covered the shortfall.

Succession of Pastors

Through the years our congregation has been blessed by the leadership of the following pastors:

- The Rev. Jim Scott, Organizing Pastor (1984-1985)
- The Rev. Ben Walters, Interim Pastor (1985)
- The Rev. Ed Hamilton and the Rev. Myrlene Hamilton, Co-pastors (1986-1988)
- The Rev. John K. Wilson, Stated Supply (1988-1989)
- The Rev. Ken Smith, Pastor (1989-1997)
- The Rev. Arlys Wilbur, Interim Pastor (1997-1998)
- The Rev. Dr. Dean Knapp, Pastor (1998-2000)
- The Rev. Robert Palmer, Interim Pastor (2001)
- The Rev. Piper B. Cartland, Pastor (2002-2023)
- The Rev. Blake A. Severson, Interim Pastor (2023 – present)

Research

Demographics

Knowing your community helps a church understand its needs. Coupling those needs with our church's talents helps us minister to the community now and in the future. Continually striving to meet our community's needs will likely nurture our spiritual growth, individually and as a church. Numerous biblical passages support the call to service; Luke 14, 12-14; John 3, 11 & 17-18.

Environmental Systems Research Institute, Inc. a geographic information system software company completed the analysis to aid us in our understanding of community. The 20-minute drive boundary narrative suggests Eagle River Presbyterian Church (ERPC) identify and evaluate unexpected data within the report. The narrative suggests these data anomalies may identify ministry opportunities.

Methods

A 20-minute drive radius from our church was used to define our community boundaries. Age, gender, ethnicity, education and income distribution were the principal demographic information gathered. Supplemental information evaluated and used for comparative analysis included scaling the boundaries slightly to 10-mile radius and assessing church demographics. Residents on Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson were excluded from the community evaluation. Congregational demographics included membership and attendance levels, members' ages, marital status, and racial/ethnic make-up. The "Knowing your Community" report also evaluated citizenry categories and their nuances, e.g., motivations, beliefs, and priorities.

Eagle River and Chugiak demographics was used to further narrow the data scale. Rationale for delineating/describing information from a smaller data set was to compare data in closer proximity to ERPC. These areas are where the vast majority of ERPC members reside. This domain will likely sustain ERPC membership rolls, contribute to any foreseeable growth, and perhaps be more receptive to ERPC ministry efforts.

Eagle River and Chugiak data was collected from ZIP Code 99577 Info, Map, Demographics for Eagle River, AK and ZIP Code 99567 Info, Map, Demographics for Chugiak, AK. U.S. Census 2019-2023 American Community Surveys was the data source referenced on these web page. Other references used to evaluate Eagle River and Chugiak data included ZIP Code 99577 Map, Demographics, More for Eagle River, AK, ZIP Code 99567 Map, Demographics, More for Chugiak, AK and Census Reporter: Making Census Data Easy to Use for both zip codes.

Information gathered using a 20-minute boundary scale is reported under heading, "Your Community", (YC). Information gathered using a 10-mile radius boundary scale is categorized as "Demographic Profile", (DP). Zip code data is reported as, 99577 and 99567. Congregational demographics (CD) data is self-explanatory.

The methodology used to illustrate the data sets appear similar. U.S Census data is referenced as the data source for all sources. Precision between data sets, e.g., population and household totals is not exact. Exercise caution when comparing YC/DP and zip code data.

Population

YC - 91,726; DP - 33,326; CD – 82; 99567 – 9036; 99577 – 26,947

Note: Population according to the 2020 U.S. Census for zip code 99567 - 9,036 and 99577 – 26,947. These population total were used in the data analysis. Population Data totals cited in ZIP Code 99577 Map, Demographics, More for Eagle River, AK and ZIP Code 99567 Map, Demographics, More for Chugiak, AK site were 99577 – 26,010 and 7,920. U.S. Census 2011-2023 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates. DP05. DEMOGRAPHIC AND HOUSING ESTIMATES. ZIP-Codes.com estimates the 2024 populations at 5,594 and 27,024 respectively.

Principal population variation between YC and DP data is the YC report is more inclusion of northeastern Anchorage. The area defined by zip code 99504, Muldoon is fully captured in the YC population. The YC population appears to also include portions of zip code 99508, Russian Jack, and perhaps other portions of neighborhoods west of Muldoon. The DP population data appears to only include the north by northeastern portion of zip code, 99504. Presently, two known church members reside in zip code 99504.

The DP reported median age as 33.5; YC reported the median age as 32.8. The median age reported for zip code 99577 and 99567 was 34.9 and 39.4 respectfully. Both YC and DC data report declining populations. The population is forecasted to decline through 2029. Zip code 99567 maybe declining at a faster rate than the other survey areas.

Age Distribution

A comparison of 2024 age distribution between the two YC and DP varied by less than 1%, in all but one age bracket. The 20-minute drive boundary age bracket is 25–34-year-olds. The variance was 1.9%. Conversely the ten-mile boundary had a higher ratio, 1.2% more 35–44-year-olds than the 20-minute drive sampling boundary.

A comparison of the forecasted 2029 age distribution displayed similar uniformity. The largest variance was again in the 20-minute drive boundary 25-34 age bracket, 1.4% more than the 10-mile boundary 25-34 age bracket.

Age distribution appears to get older in the zip codes 99577 and 99567. The median age in zip code 99577 is 34. The median age in 99567 is estimated at 39.

ERPC age distribution differs from the other sampling boundaries. Half of ERPC attendees are reportedly 56+ years old. Both YC and DP sample boundaries tabulate 55+ year olds at roughly 20%. Zip code 99577 data indicated 55+ year olds at just over 22%. Zip code 99567 zip code data indicated 55+ year olds at 30%.

Table 1. Ethnicity

10-mile boundary - DP				20-minute drive boundary -YC			
2024				2029			
	Pop.	%			Pop.	%	
White	24,120	72.4	23,178	70.5	White	46,628	50.8
Black	1,069	3.2	1,090	3.3	Black	6,296	6.9
Native	1,390	4.2	1,398	4.3	Native	8,079	8.8
Asian	980	2.9	1,089	3.3	Asian	8,559	9.3
Pacific Islander	166	0.5	181	0.6	Pac. Islander	4,518	4.9
Hispanic	4,154	9.5	3,366	10.2	Hispanic	10,009	10.9
Other Races	921	2.8	978	3.0	Other Races	3,756	4.1
2 or More	4,681	14.1	4,980	15.1	2 or More	13,890	15.1

The survey boundaries depict a substantial ethnicity inconsistency. When more of the Anchorage area is included in the survey there is greater diversity, with substantially less Caucasians-only present. Generally,, the diversity of both DP and YC boundary areas are expected to increase through 2029.

Table 2, Ethnicity Distribution - Zip Code, 99577

White:	20,429	80.08%
Black:	593	2.32%
Hispanic:	2,082	8.16%
Asian:	673	2.64%
American Indian:	1,040	4.08%
Hawaiian:	127	0.50%
Other:	568	2.23%

2020 U.S. Census

Table 3, Ethnicity Distribution - Zip Code, 99567

White	6,898	82.89%
Black:	69	0.83%
Hispanic:	523	6.28%
Asian:	222	2.67%
American Indian:	428	5.14%
Hawaiian:	15	0.18%
Other:	167	2.01%

2020 U.S. Census

2020 U.S. Census

The ethnicity of the zip codes is distinctly different then YC and DP areas. Again, exercise caution when making wide-ranging comparisons since the race categories differ. Also, the zip code areas is a subset of the DP area. Yet, the estimated population between DP and the two combined zip codes is quite close. That there are more Caucasians present in two zip code areas within the YC and DP areas is a reasonable assumption. The ERPC demographic sampling size is extremely small, yet the ethnicity data indicates the population is monochromatic.

Households, 2024Households, 2029

Total	Average size	Total	Average Size
DP – 11,238	2.82	DC – 11,308	2.77
YC – 32,234	2.72	YC – 32,409	2.67
99577 – 9,591*	2.77		
99567 – 3,199*	2.76		
CD –			

* Data source is unknown, believed to originate from 2020 Census

The household size variance between areas is relatively small. The CD household size is not known but believed to be less than the other sampling areas.

20-minute boundary –YC

2024 Households, 32,234

2029 Households, 32,409

Median Income, \$97.7K

Median Income, \$106.8K

Income	Percent	Income	Percent
<\$15K	6.7%	\$15K>less	6.1%
\$15-24K	4.8	\$15-24K	3.6
\$25-34K	3.9	\$25-34K	2.9
\$35-49K	8.3	\$35-49K	7.1
\$50-74K	15.6	\$50-74K	13.5
\$75-99K	11.4	\$75-99K	11.5
\$100-149K	24.9	\$100-149K	25.5
\$150-199K	12.9	\$150-199K	15.9
\$K200+	11.4	\$200K+	13.9

10 Mile boundary -DP

2024 Households, 11,238

2029 Households, 11,308

Median Income, \$125.9K

Median Income, \$143.4K

Income	Percent	Income	Percent
<\$15K	4.2%	<\$15K	3.6%
\$15K-24,999	2.2	\$15-24,999	1.5
\$25K-34,999	2.5	\$25-34,999	1.7
\$35K-49,999	6.4	\$35-49,999	4.9
\$50K-74,999	9.8	\$50K-74,999	7.9
\$75K-99,999	7.8	\$75K-99,999	7.2
\$100K-149,999	21.1	\$100K-149,999	25.5
\$150K-\$199,999	19.3	\$150K-199,999	23.0
\$200K or greater	20.7	\$200K+	24.6

The survey boundaries depict a substantial household income difference. When a larger Anchorage area is included in the survey the median income is reduced by slightly, less than \$30 thousand. The sampling boundary household income difference is projected to increase by just

over \$35 thousand by 2029. Generally, the income of both boundary areas is expected to increase from 2024 to 2029. Household number growth is expected to occur in both sampling boundaries through 2029.

The zip codes household numbers and income cited were from the 2020 census. Zip code 99567 median income is \$128,250. Zip code 99577 median income is \$135,011.

Table 4. Job Classifications

Survey Area	White Collar	Blue Collar	Services
YC	63%	21%	17%
DP	67.1%	17.3%	15.6%
Zip Code 99577	No data	No data	No data
Zip Code 99567	No data	No data	No data

Table 5. Education

Survey area	No degree	High School	Some college / Associate degree	College/Post Graduate
YC	7%	28%	33%	31%
DP	3.5%	19.5%	33.2%	43.8%
99577	4%	16%	35%	45%
99567	4%	26%	29%	41%

Military and Veterans

The YC data set indicated there were almost 8.6 thousand military members/family with TRICARE health coverage: 19 years old or younger - 4,751; 19-35 years old - 2,155; and 35-64 years-old -1,685. TRICARE is a government-managed healthcare program for active duty, retired, and Reserve military members, as well as their families. The YC survey did not include Joint Base Elmendorf–Richardson residents. Where these off base military related personnel reside within the YC survey area is unknown.

Summary

The 20-minute drive boundary (YC) area has the most expansive data that includes data not presented in the other demographic surveys. How applicability YC data is to ERPC is perplexing since the survey's southern boundaries extend well into Anchorage northern and northeastern neighborhoods. These neighborhoods generally are not where ERPC attendees reside. These neighborhoods are likely closer to the First Presbyterian Church or Immanuel Presbyterian Church in Anchorage than ERPC.

The 10-mile drive demographic (DP) is more comparable to the 99577 and 99567 zip code data sets. The estimated population in the DP survey was 33,326 while the population of the two combined zip codes is 35,983. The estimated population in the YC survey was 91,726, over 2.5 times the size of the other survey areas.

ERPC attendees predominantly originate from zip codes 99577 and 99567. The demographic of these zip codes differ greatly from YC and slightly from DP data. Generally, the zip code areas are less diverse, with more Caucasians, roughly 30% more than YC and 10% more than the DP data set. The two next largest ethnicity groups zip codes are Hispanics and Multi-racial.

Income data differed slightly between the DP and zip codes. Zip code 99577 has the highest median income. The income difference between DP and zip code varied by nearly 7%. Income difference is drastic, when compared with YC income data; almost a 25% difference or roughly \$30 thousand less income median with the YC survey area.

The variance in age distribution was relatively small. An interesting observation, zip code 99567 Chugiak has the oldest median age, roughly 5 years older than any other survey area with approximately 30% of the population 55 years of age or older.

Trends - Financial, Membership and Attendance

The Mission Study Team reviewed and evaluated ERPC's financial picture. A clear understanding of a church's financial picture is crucial for effective functioning, transparency, and long-term sustainability. Church planning for the future, whether for daily operation, mission projects, or specialty occurrences, requires knowing whether funds are available, or whether a fund-raising campaign will be needed. Adequate revenue is a necessity for a healthy church and to support the goals of the Church's Visionary Plan.

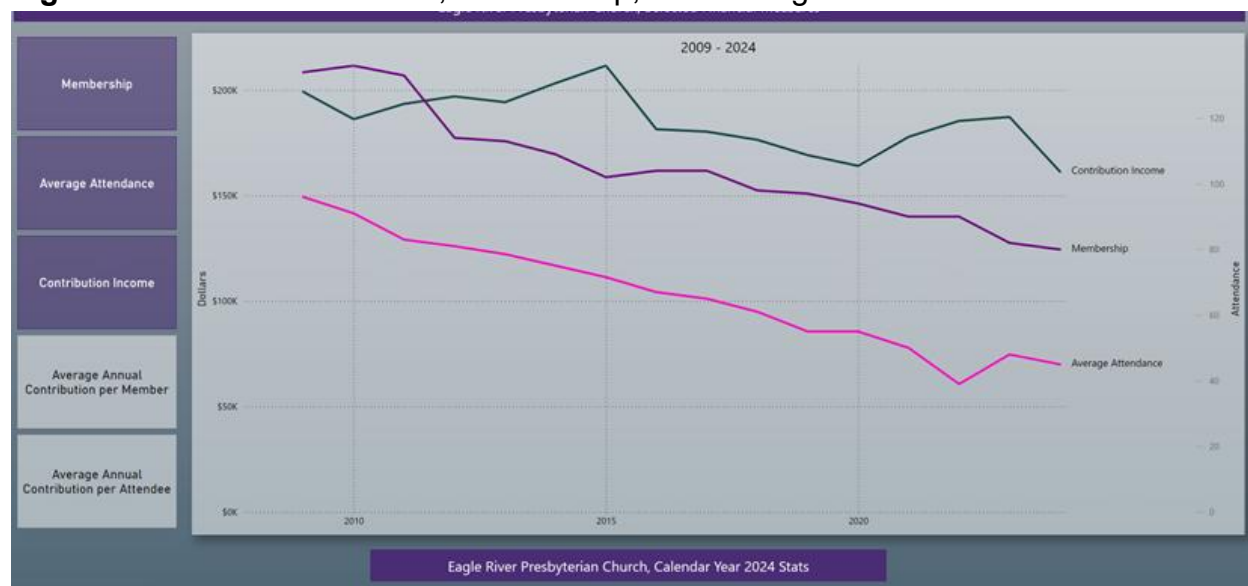
Mr. Connor Spencer evaluated and analyzed ERPC's financial data from 2009-2024 like that contained in Table 1. Mr. Spencer then used standard economic projection factors to anticipate ERPC's financial picture 3 years into the future. Linear Regression Analysis is extremely suited to this sort of data. Trends calculated from regression analysis, especially when the data is relatively consistent year after year, are very accurate. Mr Spencer also obtained ERPC membership and attendance data for use in analysis. Graphs were developed to pictorially show the data. The graphs were shown in a PowerPoint presentation to the Mission Team. The PowerPoint slides are shown in Appendix: Finance.

Below, Table 1(a) has excerpts from Table 1 to provide a "quick look" at past-mid-current data from the past 15 years. See Table 1 for all 15 years of data for the various categories and see the Annual Reports (in ERPC Office) for itemized details within the categories. The slides generally show that ERPC's income and expenditures has been relatively stable in the \$210k-\$260k range from 2009 through 2024. Total expenditures are usually slightly less than the total revenue/income for each year, except in recent years.

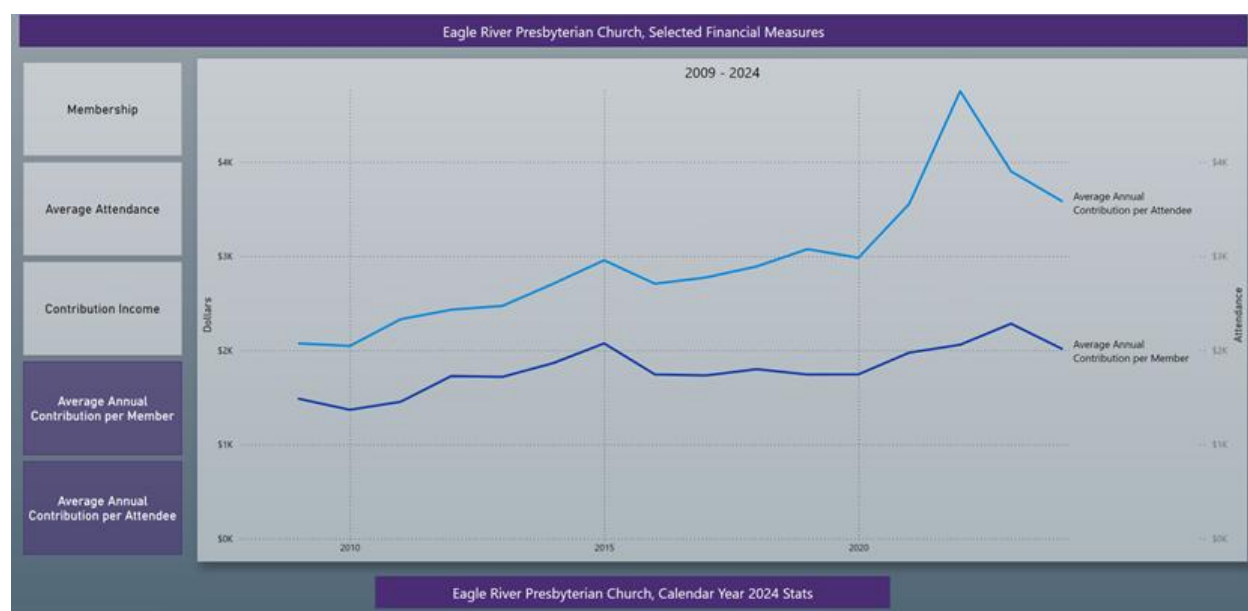
Table 6. ERPC Financial Summary

TABLE 1(a) ERPC FINANCIAL SUMMARY (Income & Expenses)						
Partial Table (see Table 1 in Appendix for complete 2009-2024 data)						
ERPC Income	2024	2023	2017	2016	2010	2009
Contributions	\$161,323.13	\$187,248.89	\$180,308.65	\$181,437.20	\$186,223.00	\$199,165.00
Rental Income	\$ 60,788.00	\$ 24,207.45	\$ 48,496.80	\$ 12,024.00	\$ 48,039.00	\$ 47,736.00
Misc. Income	\$ 11,825.50	\$ 9,832.39	\$ 16,521.84	\$ 15,807.06	\$ 12,176.00	\$ 13,010.00
Total	\$233,936.63	\$221,288.73	\$245,327.29	\$209,268.26	\$246,438.00	\$259,911.00
ERPC Expenses	2024	2023	2017	2016	2010	2009
Building	\$ 59,608.06	\$ 71,636.31	\$ 52,399.64	\$ 50,185.52	\$ 74,114.00	\$ 83,335.00
Church Office Expense	\$ 7,638.24	\$ 6,819.94	\$ 6,387.55	\$ 5,330.90	\$ 7,584.00	\$ 7,112.00
Session & Administration	\$ 431.95	\$ 449.40	\$ 5,107.60	\$ 5,584.92	\$ 6,151.00	\$ 6,225.00
Christian Education	\$ 705.74	\$ 1,874.06	\$ 1,285.98	\$ 772.47	\$ 651.00	\$ 1,424.00
Personnel	\$156,937.30	\$135,256.99	\$136,971.21	\$139,791.16	\$136,979.00	\$137,520.00
Fellowship	\$ 1,732.63	\$ 166.77	\$ 961.57	\$ 413.81	\$ 621.00	\$ 427.00
Worship & Music	\$ 1,358.07	\$ 1,346.53	\$ 2,199.70	\$ 1,962.15	\$ 1,201.00	\$ 1,328.00
Mission/Outreach	\$ 17,604.33	\$ 18,063.70	\$ 13,492.59	\$ 8,304.00	\$ 18,899.00	\$ 18,520.00
Generosity	\$ 489.58	\$ 363.35	\$ 7.00	\$ 92.22	\$ 44.00	\$ 191.00
Total	\$246,505.90	\$235,977.05	\$218,812.84	\$212,437.15	\$246,244.00	\$256,082.00
INCOME (-) EXPENSES	\$ (12,569.27)	\$ (14,688.32)	\$ 26,514.45	\$ (3,168.89)	\$ 194.00	\$ 3,829.00

Membership and Attendance. Figure 1 is a graph which plots: (a) contribution income, (b) membership, and (c) average attendance for the period 2009 through 2024. Above, Table 1 and 6 show that total revenue and total expenditures have been relatively constant within a varied range. Conversely, both membership and church attendance have declined over the period. Membership has declined at a steady rate from nearly 120 to the current 80 members; and average attendance has declined from about 90 to 40 people. Perhaps indicative of this decline in people is also a steady decline in contribution income.

Figure 1. Contribution income, membership, and average attendance.

Increased Burden. Decreasing membership and attendance combined with relatively constant total expenditures means there is an increasing financial burden put on remaining members and those attending the church. Figure 2 is a graph that plots contribution income on a per person basis. The congregational contribution burden which was about \$2,000/person/year in 2015 and is currently about \$3,000/person/year in 2025. Financial trends graphs (Slides 10 and 11 in the Appendix) indicate the burden is expected to be \$4,000/person/year by 2027.

Figure 2. Contribution income on a per person basis.

Financial Trends 2025-2027. Slides 10 and 11 in the Finance Appendix show graphically where ERPC will be in 2027 should the current trends continue. As the graph lines from 2009 to 2024 show a steady decline in a) contribution income, b) membership, and c) average attendance, it is not surprising that Linear Regression Analysis shows the decline continuing.

Discussion. Currently ERPC has a good financial picture with money in savings and with expenditures being met by contributions and income. The trend in the continuing decline in both membership and attendance is cause for great concern. When the declining trend is forecast into the future for just 3 years, the increased burden on membership will begin to cause stress on membership. Many current practices, programs, and outreach missions may have to be reduced, curtailed, or cancelled. It is important to consider that almost all national financial experts expect salaries, housing, commodities, and services to rise at approximately 2.5 percent/year.

However, many things can change. If the church changes course, and can acquire new donating members, or can begin to request community support for various outreach programs or can begin new programs or activities to increase revenue, then that will lessen the burden on membership and reduce financial stress. It is advised to consider ways to increase organization revenues, engage in community outreach.

One thing became obvious during the financial evaluation. There is a lack of insightful data on who is contributing and by how much. Capturing the source of revenue will help indicate how reliant the church is on specific members and, given that the congregation is particularly aged, it may pose significant problems if individuals die or depart the church. The Mission Study Team is not advocating that names and amounts they donate be released publicly. However, it is

important to know whether one member is giving 90 percent of the contribution income or whether 75 percent of the contribution income is derived from 20 members. Those in church leadership need to know the reliability and sensitivity of the income stream to changing membership in making budgeting decisions.

ERPC needs to incorporate the expected increased future costs into the 10- and 25-year plans for future spending. Recurring high costs items such as furnace replacement, painting the building, replacing asphalt parking, as well as various planned outreach missions should be shown in these 10- and 25-year plans and reflected in yearly budgets.

Conversations with our Congregation

The Mission Study Team queried members of our congregation, both church members and nonmembers to ascertain their view of the church regarding who it was in the past, who they believe the church is now, and their aspirations for church growth in the future, not only in attendance and membership, but in financial security, spirituality, and the positive impact we can have on the community we serve.

The overall mission of the Presbyterian Church (USA), is, among other things, to be Christ's faithful evangelist, making disciples of all nations, sharing with others a deep life of worship, prayer, fellowship, and service. This mission is complex and includes offering worship and sacraments, prayer, education and teaching, mission and outreach, stewardship, fellowship, pastoral care, and maintaining financial health. By asking the following questions in the questionnaires, Town Hall meetings, and the survey, we wanted to understand how the congregation felt we had been and are fulfilling ERPC's overall mission, and how we can do it better as we move forward into the future.

Congregational Questions

The Congregation was given one of the following questions on three separate Sundays during the summer of 2024 to introduce the Mission Study process. The questions were handed out during the church service and the attendees were asked to respond to the questions either during the service and place their response in the offering plate or return their responses to the office later that week.

- July 28, 2024, the Congregation was asked What brought them to the church, ERPC?
- August 11, 2024, they were asked What keeps the Congregation at ERPC?
- August 25, 2024, they were asked what their ideal church is and to be specific?

The following are the tabulated responses from the questions.

Questionnaire 1

What brought you to this church, ERPC? Question #1 7/28/24 23 Responses	Raised in or previously attended a Presbyterian Church	Church location	Church size.	Invited by a friend	Welcoming, friendly, loving congregation	ERPC "Church Family"	Pastor	ERPC Missions, Food Pantry	Presbyterian Tenants or Doctrine
TOTALS:	10	7	2	6	5	3	6	2	4

Following are examples of some of the responses to “What brought you to the church, ERPC?”:

- The people were so welcoming, I liked the size of the church, not too big, not too small. I “church-shopped” when we first moved here but kept coming back to ERPC. We are truly a “church family” here.
- I was raised in the Presbyterian Church and this church felt familiar in its structure and traditions, which I like! I also cherish the multi-generational demographics of the congregation.
- When we were looking for a church home, we visited several churches in the area and chose ERPC because of the people—their welcoming, caring nature. We knew nothing about the Presbyterian Church—we were raised Lutheran and Baptist but were drawn to THIS community of faith.
- It is important to me that we attend a PCUSA church and while we visited many PCUSA churches in the area, we chose this one because it is closest to our house, so we could be more involved and regularly attend church. Also, I admired the fact that the church chose to be in the center of town so it could better serve the community, especially through the Food Pantry.

Questionnaire 2

What keeps you at ERPC? Question #2 8/11/24 21 Responses	Feel appreciated, cared for, helped by the congregation	Friendly, welcoming, loving congregation	Congregation is generous with time and money	Fellowship	ERPC “Church Family”	Sermons, Teaching, Lectionary	Faith or bible-based church	Mission of the church	Other
TOTALS:	5	13	3	6	8	8	2	5	3

In response to “What keeps you at ERPC?” most respondents said the friendly, welcoming and loving Congregation was the reason they stayed at ERPC. Many attendees also said the fellowship within the Congregation, the feeling of a “Church Family,” the Sermons and the Mission of the church caught their interest and kept them coming back to ERPC.

Following are examples of some of the responses to “What keeps the Congregation at ERPC?”:

- The church is our only local family. Also, we know we can call on many people in the church if we need help. Folks help with food, driving etc. when needed, that is Family!
 - Location
 - Bible based
- Church Family
 - Feel Appreciated

- Friendly, loving congregation.
- A place where if something needs to be done, people will step up to do it.
- The friendly, welcoming feeling of the church. Knowing that the people in the church genuinely care about you and what is going on in your life.
- The people, the people, the people. We have a wonderful congregation that helps when needed, loves each other, supports each other. We have differences, but we seem to listen respectfully and try to understand each other's point of view. So, ERPC feels like not only God's home, but our home with God.

Questionnaire 3

What is your ideal church? Be specific. Question #3 8/25/24 15 Responses	Prayer Activities	Congregation Characteristics	Congregation Size	Christen Education Adult Bible Study	Christen Education Children's Bible Study	Youth Programs	Sermons	Pastor Qualities	Church Missions	Music Program & Preferences	Fellowship & Other Comments
TOTALS:	1	13	3	5	6	2	4	3	6	6	3

In response to “What is your ideal church?” most of the respondents said the congregation's characteristics were important to them, such as a faith, friendly, welcoming, loving and tight-knit congregation. Many people also commented that Christian education for adults and children, challenging biblically based sermons, a pastor who helps congregants grow spiritually and the mission of the church were important to them.

Following are examples of some of the responses to “What is their ideal church and be specific?”:

- Caring, open community of faith
 - Sunday school or Bible studies for adults and children
 - Fellowship opportunities
 - Opportunities for mission work in the community
- A spirit-led, Bible teaching church singing old and new hymns and led by a chancel choir.
 - A church with music: traditional, and some “modern” is okay.
 - A church where you get to know members.
 - A church that has prayer, also throughout the week
 - a church with lots of children and a strong CE department
 - a church intimately involved in the community and has educational offerings about issues of the day and how we might respond to the issues.
 - a pastor who visits people/members

- That we welcome all people—reach out to the LGBTQ+ Community as it seems many denominations do not seem to welcome them.
 - Also reach out to all ages and ethnic origins.
 - Continue mission outreach.
- A church whose members pay attention enough to God’s direction, to be alert to the hurt of others’ situations, and faithful enough to offer a hand to help, a shoulder to lean on and an ear to listen.

Town Hall Meeting 1

The following 10 questions were asked at our first Town Hall meeting in October 2024. Around 30 people participated and were broken into groups of five to six people. Pastor Blake Severson moderated the meeting and members of the Mission Study team or Session took notes. Below are the questions and a summary of the responses.

Question 1. Three words that describe ERPC are: The most common words used to describe ERPC were friendly, welcoming, family-oriented, mission-oriented, fellowship, and traditional. Other words mentioned were old or aging, compassionate, small, giving, musical, and change-resistant.

Question 2: An important characteristic/enduring characteristic about ERPC is: The most frequently mentioned characteristics included location, Presbyterian, supportive congregation, family, mission oriented, relationships that extend outside the building (church), perseverance, tight-knit, small congregation, welcoming, wide range of talents within the congregation, and hard working. Other characteristics mentioned were that the church had warm fellowship times, a significant food-bank ministry, scripture-based focus on love, and was always in need of volunteers.

Question 3. An important event in the life of ERPC is:

The main responses to this question were COVID, the 2018 earthquake, paying off the building's mortgage, buying the building, pastoral change including Rev. Cartland's retirement and Rev. Ken Smith's time as pastor, establishment of the Food Pantry, and renovating the building as part of the earthquake repair. Other comments included renovating the building after the initial purchase, Rev. Dean Knapp leaving, finding a tenant for the rental space, raising funds for a new church building that did not happen, long-time organist and music director Pam Arthur leaving, and hiring Pastor Blake as the interim pastor.

Question 4. A time when ERPC was most tested:

Some of the responses were the same as in question three, including COVID, the earthquake, Rev. Dean Knapp as pastor, capital project to build a new church that did not happen, and finding a new tenant. Other responses included the church split in 2000, PCUSA doctrine change resulting in the loss of members, going from two services to one, and long-time organist Pam Arthur leaving.

Question 5: The thing I most appreciate about ERPC is: A welcoming atmosphere was the most common response, followed by fellowship, the people, spiritual growth, mission, sense of family, music, Christian learning, supportive congregation, and Sunday School. Also mentioned were Bible-based sermons, being non-judgmental, and supportive of diverse opinions.

Question 6. The thing I appreciate most about being Presbyterian is: Responses included familiarity, focus on consensus/government by the people, don't have hell and brimstone type of sermons, belief in the full love of God as most important in our lives, God's forgiveness preached, structure, uplifting messages, Bible based, less dogmatic, and

traditional. Also mentioned was enduring grace, less rigid format, and that the church was open to everyone.

Question 7. Something that has never made sense to me about ERPC is: Some people asked why we have communion only once a month, why we only have one service, why the fellowship coffee hour is held late morning when many people are at work, why we are not ethnically diverse, why do we have so many elected officers for such a small church, and why our process for finding a new pastor takes so long. Others questioned the efficiency of our computer setup for live streaming, why aren't we more consistent about following the Book of Order, and why the process for our pastoral search is taking so long.

Question 8. One thing I've always wondered about us, ERPC is: Some of the things people wondered about were how much power the Presbytery actually has, do we cover the whole Bible through sermons or only certain passages, how can we attract more young people, do we collectively want responsive readings, is the church going to survive, do we need a full-time pastor, will we have a regular choir again, can we combine with another church, why children of congregants don't attend, and when will we grow family/kids/adult Sunday School. Additional responses asked when will we have a permanent pastor, why do our expenses to income look so bad, and how do our committees function.

Question 9. Three things we must continue to do are: The three things most commonly mentioned were to continue to offer a traditional worship service, offer fellowship opportunities, and to use our building to support the community, e.g. housing the Food Pantry and providing space for other organizations to meet, such as AA and Scouts, etc. Other things frequently mentioned included Sunday School for children and adults, mission and outreach opportunities, having music, being a welcoming community, broadcast/live-stream our Sunday service, have Bible studies, be flexible, and support our garden.

Some things we could begin: (This was added by one group)

Opportunities for corporate prayer beyond Sunday morning and create a prayer room.

Question 10. Three things we could stop doing are: These responses included having meetings that are too long, narrow focused missions, too long announcement time in worship, responsive readings, offering during service, one-person committees, broadcasting our worship service, fighting change, PowerPoint slides as part of worship, and having a printed bulletin.

Town Hall Meeting 2

The following seven questions were asked at our second Town Hall meeting in February 2025. Around 18 people participated and were broken into groups of four to five people. Pastor Severson moderated the meeting and members of the Mission Study team or Session took notes. These questions focused mainly on the present and future of the church. Below are the questions and a summary of the responses.

1. As I think about who we have been, I sometimes wonder:

Several respondents wondered whether our aging congregation resulted in people being reluctant to take on leadership positions in the church. Several people also asked why we no longer have two worship services, will we have men's or women's retreats again, will we have Presbyterian women's or men's groups, and will we offer adult Sunday School. Several asked why we do not offer more contemporary music and does our sense of tradition result in our resistance to change. Growth of the church was mentioned several times, especially in terms of having more children attend services and becoming more diverse in race, age, income, and ethnicity.

2. As I think about who we are now, I am excited about:

The three most common terms used were fellowship, mission, and use of our building. Fellowship was expressed in a variety of ways: starting men's and women's retreats, having small group dinners, new initiatives i.e. Wednesday morning coffee hour and prayer ministry, seeing new faces, friendships within the congregation, our sense of community, the way we support each other and our willingness to include people. How well the church has maintained its commitment to mission was mentioned and how our building facilitates our mission by housing the Food Pantry and allowing AA, Scouts and other organizations to meet there. People were also excited by the fact that we are no longer burdened by a mortgage, and we have a good renter.

3. As I think about the future, I wonder if it's possible to:

Growing the church seemed to be foremost on people's minds. Ideas included, starting a children's program, growing the membership, adding adult Sunday School and a Vacation Bible School, developing a men's group, having more children in the congregation, extending personal invites to people to attend worship, and involving more people in leading worship. Others wondered if it would be possible to become more diverse, keep the political divide out of our church, keep conservative members in our church, remain relevant in today's society, change people's minds regarding organized religion, and stay viable both financially and as a congregation. People also expressed a desire to perform more outreach in the community by making our building available for outside presentations, reaching out to military families in the area, reaching out to families who use the Food Pantry, giving support to develop a coalition to address community issues, and inviting others to our worship service from a small fellowship/church in the area. Other ideas centered around music, with people wondering whether we could have the bell choir/chancel choir perform more than just Christmas and Easter, and whether we could hire/provide a song leader.

4. As I think about the future, I am concerned about:

Finding a permanent pastor was the most often mentioned, followed by survival as a church, and our financial security. Concerns about finding a pastor were expressed as finding one we could afford, the length of time it was taking to hire one, and who God will send to be our pastor. Survival as a church was mentioned in terms of being able to bring/interest younger people in our church, church attendance as a whole, lack of inspiration for young people, age of congregation and how we can attract more people. Financial security revolved around people being concerned about our budget, our financial future, and being able to afford a new pastor. Other concerns mentioned were that we were becoming too partisan, people being thoughtful to each other in the future, division based on political beliefs, and balancing difficult conversations against a sense of unity.

5. The biggest strength of ERPC moving forward is:

The most mentioned strengths were mission/outreach, fellowship, people, location, and music. Mission/outreach includes use of our building to house the Food Pantry and for meetings of AA, Scouts, and others. The building also gives us plenty of space to grow. Fellowship reflects the importance of the people of the church in terms of their commitment to each other, their willingness to listen, being connected, strong core beliefs as well as our fellowship events such as game night and dinner with friends. Location is important in that we are centrally located in Eagle River and draw from communities both north and south of the church. People also included an appreciation of our music director Connor Spencer and our administrative assistant Elizabeth Hobbie. Also viewed as strengths were our tradition and structure that provides comfort and our building, which has been newly renovated since the 2018 earthquake and gives us plenty of space to grow.

6. Our church would like to increase participation in both church and community activities. What insights can you share that might help us discern how we can address this:

People shared a variety of ideas that included everything from serving beer and brats and bringing a guest, to having shorter and fewer meetings, and offering Vacation Bible School as a limited event. Other suggestions were to have two worship services (one contemporary and one traditional), partnering with other churches in the community, identifying interests of church members and needs of the community, inviting people to come to worship, and partnering with the Food Pantry in their Saturday food distribution program. People suggested that we start small and be deliberate. People also thought we should share information about community organizations, e.g., Rotary, Community Councils, VFW, etc. and wondered if we were visible enough as a church in the community (do we need to improve our signage).

7. What are you willing to sacrifice to ensure that we navigate the challenges of the future? What are you willing to give to ensure that we navigate the challenges of the future?

People said they would be willing to sacrifice some traditional parts of the service, announcements at the beginning of worship, order of worship, the building (renting the sanctuary to other churches) or moving to a smaller building, and having a full-time pastor.

In terms of giving, people were willing to give more money and time, especially if it was for a clear task or special funds for a particular program. Others were willing to give more support and trust to the church, patience, and to volunteer more.

Survey

The Mission Study Team conducted a church-wide web-based survey. The team reviewed questions from professional surveys at other congregations shared by our interim pastor and revised them, where needed, to match our congregation and community. The team received 49 responses to the survey. The full survey results are in an appendix to this report. The results show our members and regular attendees to be:

- Mostly older adults, slightly more women than men, almost all white/Caucasian, mostly with bachelor's degrees or higher levels of education
- Respondents were politically diverse
- Almost half earn an income of \$150 thousand or more
- Most live in Eagle River and Chugiak
- Most attend because they were raised in the PCUSA, followed by those who liked what they experienced while visiting and returned, founded the church, were invited by friends to attend, liked the pastor or a combination of the above
- Most of the attendees have attended for more than ten years
- Most attend several times a month and financially contribute at least once a month.
- Outside of worship, are more likely to spend time on individual prayer, meditation, devotion, or Bible study than with family or in groups
- Most think our facility is the appropriate size, in an adequate or excellent condition and easy to find
- More think our congregation is shrinking with slightly less thinking it is staying the same size
- Most are excited about the direction the church is going, are welcoming of newcomers by speaking to them and including them in groups, and want to gain more members and a greater diversity of members
- Most feel the church holds strong values and beliefs, works for social justice, supports its ministries through its members, and supports members in developing spiritual practices
- Believe that the church has been a source of learning for adults first, children second, and youth third, but learning for children and youth is more important to them than learning for adults
- Almost all believe the church excels at building relationships among members, and these relationships are most important to them
- Most experience worship that makes them think and this is most important to them followed by worship that calls them to action
- There are mixed feelings about whether we are ready to try something new, invite all to contribute in decisions, and deal with disagreements openly. However, most think we embrace differences of opinion
- Most feel helped when they try new ideas, but new ideas take a long time to implement
- Most feel we are changing the community for the better and are using the strengths of members in ministry, but feel less strongly that we are working with organizations and

individuals outside of our church and less strongly that many individuals from the community frequent our church

- Most believe we are more comfortable when things stay the same and do not pride ourselves in the ability to adapt, but most embrace change, are willing to change to achieve our goals, and love the enthusiasm of those with new ideas.
- Most think we frequently discuss change in worship, but most do not think we try new things in worship. More are willing to try something new in worship and most think new ideas are welcome in worship.
- Most receive their communication from the church in an email, worship announcements, printed bulletins or word of mouth. Almost no one gets church news from our website or social media.
- Some experienced minor conflict that was easily reconciled, fewer experienced serious conflict that we worked through, even fewer experienced major conflict where some left the church, the fewest experienced major conflict where some withheld donations, and no one experienced major conflict that split or almost closed the congregation
- The congregation ranked conflict resolution styles from most frequently to least frequently used in our congregation in this order: defer to leadership to resolve, negotiate to reach a mutually agreed upon solution, avoid the issue, make a change in church staff, reduce or end participation in the church, work behind the scenes to form alliances, and involve an outside mediator

Observations

The Mission Study Team read books, conducted research, reviewed, and deliberated over the town hall meetings notes and congregational questionnaires, and has compiled observations that the ERPC Session and the future Pastor Nominating Committee should consider for ERPC to have a successful future. The observations are drawn from the team generated summaries and evaluations in the various sections of the report, and from the detailed notes, questionnaires, graphs or pertinent information generated by the team that are shown in the appendices.

Demographics

The “Your Community”, YC survey indicated there are appropriately 8.6 thousand active duty, retired, and reserve military members, as well as their families living off base. Where these families reside within the YC survey is unknown.

ERPC Demographics. The congregation is 98 percent Caucasian. The age breakout is 50 percent over the age of 55 and 50 percent between the ages of 18 and 49, and 13 that are under the age of 18. This demographic is important because it influences how ERPC does things. Various age groups have different interests, concepts, ideas of importance, communication styles, social interactions, etc. An older population tends to communicate best with others of the same age group.

Mission and Outreach

The ERPC congregation participates in a wide variety of outreach missions of charitable programs, a multitude of activities, and numerous inter-church prayers and social functions. ERPC supports several mission and outreach programs, i.e., Food Pantry, AA, gardening, needed supplies to schools and prisons, etc. Members of the church also have personal special community missions and projects the congregation is involved with. There were comments amongst Mission Study Team members that ERPC should focus on just a few “special” mission activities the church would sponsor for maximum impact, while continuing to encourage individual projects. The Mission Study Team agrees that focusing the church on fewer core mission activities would be beneficial to volunteer recruitment and energy.

Congregational Growth

Increase Membership/Growth. Townhall meetings and questionnaires indicate the congregation recognizes and has a strong belief that ERPC needs to increase membership. There is a desire to have more children in the church. Statistics show that membership and attendance at ERPC has declined over the past 15 years.

The Mission Study Team noticed that ERPC congregants preferred to center outreach and mission efforts within area codes 99577 and 99567. Identifying and providing needed public services may provide a ministry magnet for our church since many public services are only provided within Anchorage or the Matanuska-Susitna Valley.

Building Our Congregation. Based on the results of the survey, we observe that ERPC wants to:

- Capitalize on our strengths
 - We have excitement and enthusiasm for new ideas.
 - We are building relationships among attendees and welcoming newcomers
 - We are willing to embrace change in general and in worship
 - We have a desire for more members and a more diverse congregation
 - We feel that we are changing the community for the better with strong values and beliefs
- Focus on evangelism to grow the church
 - While staying true to our values, elevate what is special about our denomination in advertising
 - Encourage current members and attendees to invite their friends to church
 - Traditional Worship Service. If the worship service is defined as everything conducted inside the Sanctuary (prayer, sacrament, music, sermon, etc.) on a Sunday morning, then the current members really like it. There were very few complaints or suggestions

for change from the congregation. However, the traditional service may not appeal to younger generations.

Fellowship

ERPC Fellowship is a tremendous success. The friendly family atmosphere and willingness to help each other is an attitude practiced at ERPC that is esteemed by the entire congregation. There were numerous comments that the fellowship activities conducted after service, and throughout the week, were a major reason for people becoming a member and why they continue to stay at ERPC.

Communication

The two Town Halls seemed to be a positive experience for participants. Those who participated commented that they enjoyed the chance to have a face-to-face discussion with other members of the congregation about their thoughts, hopes and aspirations for the future of the church. Comments included that they liked the fellowship atmosphere of the Town Halls, that they felt they could communicate their thoughts and ideas freely without fear of judgement, and that they felt they were truly listened to. Several commented that they thought the Town Halls were fun and that the church should hold them more often.

Communication seems such a simple thing to do, but it is exceedingly difficult to successfully accomplish. Each generational age group has different expectations, needs, desires, and ways of doing and saying things. Effective communication fosters transparency, builds trust, and enhances collaboration. In contrast, poor communication often results in misunderstandings and confusion.

Congregants felt that related knowledge and communication about events are haphazard, and members tend to participate on an informal basis.

Church Administration, Organization and Management

The many committees that serve as the Presbyterian form of governing were developed or established in past years when churches had large congregations. ERPC only has about 80 members/friends, yet continues to maintain the committees from when the congregation was approaching 200 members/friends. This has led to struggles to get volunteers to serve, resulting in committees of one, with a result of gross overburden. Many folks who reach this point don't just quit the committee, they leave ERPC.

Finance and Budget

Consider measuring contributions by "giving units" instead of by the number of members. This may illustrate how concentrated our contributions are. Tracking contributions by members instead of by giving units dilutes the contributions by unit.

Congregants with higher incomes might give more money if the church had clear goals about what our needs are.

Financial Health.

Positive: (a) ERPC currently has no debt, (b) revenue (contributions, rent, etc.) meets expenditures, and (c) the current contribution is about \$3,000/person/year. The budget/expenditures have been a relatively flat line for the past 7 to 10 years.

Concerning: Financial trends indicate increasing costs in the near future, resulting in an increased burden on congregational contribution, which were about \$2,000/person/year in 2015, are currently about \$3,000/person/year in 2025, and are expected to be \$4,000/person/year in 2030. The increasing financial burden on membership may be unsustainable if membership remains flat or declines.

Financial Plan and Budget. ERPC has an inadequate financial plan for the future. There are costly maintenance items (furnaces [20 yrs], paint exterior [15 yrs], asphalt parking [30 yrs] that must be replaced on a periodic basis that are ignored until failure. ERPC goals for the future will have resultant costs.

Church Building

The congregation likes the building and its location in central Eagle River. Many believe there is some godly influence in ERPC acquiring the property and being able to maintain it. There is a strong congregational belief that the building type and its location are extremely positive attributes to providing mission and outreach in the community.

Looking Toward the Future

Throughout the Mission Study Team process, whether it was at the Town Halls, the survey, or the questionnaires, participants were asked about the future of the church and what they would like to see change or happen. While there were some new suggestions, e.g., creating a prayer room and starting a prayer ministry or starting a men's group, many suggestions reflected nostalgia for things we used to do and would like to bring back. Examples included restarting the women's retreat, making the Thanksgiving baskets that went to individual families at two Eagle River elementary schools or having a vacation Bible school again.

A living document is the goal of the Mission Study report according to the Presbytery of James mission study guidelines. The guideline indicates the report should provide recommendations to help the congregation measure its progress in the years to come. This guidance wants our mission report to be "a living document – not just something that fills a three-ring binder."

Changing Churches. Literature indicates successful churches are evolving, moving from a traditional format, through a transitional stage, to reach a final transformational stage. Getting

into the transformational category generally requires knowing the church's core beliefs, making an examination of the surrounding community, and developing a vision that will aid the community while implementing and spreading Christian values. The Mission Study Team believes ERPC is in the traditional category, and believes change is needed for a vibrant future. The team believes that ERPC must develop a strong visionary set of goals for the future, followed by development of specific steps and activities to be achieved to move toward the goal.

Recommendations

Mission and Outreach Programs

The Mission Study Team believes ERPC should focus on a limited number of mission and outreach programs that are sanctioned and fully supported by ERPC and that become known in the community as an ERPC "thing." An example might be The Food Pantry - it is a separate non-profit organization affiliated with the Food Bank of AK (not officially affiliated with ERPC), but because of the whole-hearted support of ERPC, the advertising on the Food Pantry Truck, and the numerous members of the community that visit the pantry, the pantry has become totally associated with ERPC throughout the community. Let us keep the pantry going but now let's start focusing on the next outreach thing ERPC wants to become known for in the community.

Outreach.

- External focus
 - Find ways to increase partnership with outside organizations and individuals in missions
 - Invite greater participation of the local community in our church through greater participation of our church in the local community

Congregational Growth

Targeted Advertising. It is important to realize that a considerable number of the older age groups in the community (and nationwide) already go to church. If ERPC decides to pursue increasing membership, it may be prudent to focus on the age groups that do not attend a church. Stagnant growth indicates a need to do something different from the current methods to attract new members. An active advertising campaign describing the benefits of joining ERPC for younger families may help.

Match Community Demographics. The surrounding community population is significantly different from the ERPC congregation. Approximately 25 percent of the surrounding community is over 55 years old, while 50 percent of ERPC attendees are reportedly over 56 years old. Similarly, the Race/Ethnicity of the surrounding community is 20 percent nonwhite/Caucasian, while ERPC is 1 percent nonwhite/Caucasian. The surrounding community has much less income/accumulated wealth per family than the congregation. Also, a greater percentage of the

surrounding community is working families with underage children, where ERPC has a significant retired population or working families but without underage children. These differences are usually associated with different problems, interests, communication styles, social interactions, etc. than those attending ERPC. The Mission Study Team suggests these data anomalies may identify ministry opportunities. A specific and continually targeted digital outreach effort to communicate with these families, particularly during the permanent change of station season (March – September) may be warranted. Perhaps promoting military interest events, such as May being military appreciation month, with May 9^h being military spouse appreciation day. Aligning outreach and continually striving to minister to this habitually mobile population may help diversify our age demographic and ethnicity.

Communication

There is a tendency at ERPC to believe boiler plate reports such as the yearly report are sufficient communication to impart knowledge to the congregation. Communication could be improved by imparting more information on a weekly basis – not in detail but in very short summaries. Perhaps every building-related problem could have a sentence in the weekly email sent out. Perhaps Session could have a synopsis of the major topics discussed in the weekly email after each Session meeting. Keep people in the know and they will bring forth ideas and become valued team members willing to help.

- Hire a company(ies) to design a new website and create a social media presence, integrate social media with the website, and a related public engagement/marketing plan for the church. Also, modernize the options for giving to the church on the new website and social media and bulletins/displays/broadcasts with QR codes and options for payment apps.
- Session should consider holding at least two Town Halls every year. Participants had a positive experience and felt that church leadership was interested in what they had to say.

Advertising. There is a strong desire to take ERPC into the community to continue Mission and Outreach, and as a result, increase awareness of Christian principles. The current methods of advancing the benefits of being part of ERPC do not seem to be providing sufficient benefit. One of the more daunting thoughts when thinking about self-advertising is, “HOW?” Perhaps hiring a professional with a successful history in church related advertising could be considered. Advertising agencies have all the connections and resources to make an advertising campaign successful and cost-efficient. They know how to place ads, make ads, and already have the programs necessary to create them. Professionals in specialty advertising have experience in communication with the various age and ethnic groups, and local firms know what works in each individual community.

Worship

The Mission Study Team has a belief that worship should not change significantly from current practice as current members cherish it. The Mission Study Team also believes this current method of worship is not resulting in membership growth and adding new/different worship and activities at different days/times while continuing the existing worship may be a way of transitioning the Church into a new transformed phase.

- Include traditional and contemporary music (both found in our current hymnal) in worship.
- Include a song leader to lead congregants in singing all hymns, but especially new ones – this could be a volunteer (preferred) or paid position.
- Hire an expert to re-program our sanctuary lighting system, sound systems, and perhaps broadcast system, and create a user-friendly operations guide for each system.
- ERPC should have two “worship” services—one traditional and another that is more appealing to people between 16 and 40. The traditional service could remain similar to our current service format. However, the second service could be on a different day of the week, at a different time, and have a completely different format with more contemporary music and/or a discussion, quiz show or trivial pursuit format—shake it up!
- Some fellowship opportunities need to be on days and at times parents and working people may attend. Not everyone works Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., or in the Anchorage/Eagle River/Chugiak area.

Church Administration, Organization and Management

Session. The Mission Study Team feels the church lacks focus. Too many things seem to be going on at any given time without the congregation having a full understanding of what the church is doing and why. Session needs to come up with a unifying, coherent mission statement so that no matter what committee a person is on or what activity a person is participating in, there is a clear understanding of how that contributes to the overall mission of the church.

Committees: It is believed the entire ERPC administrative operation should be examined and evaluated as the goals and the “forward into the future” vision is developed. The committee burden should be tailored to fit the current size of ERPC. In general, fewer or consolidated committees may be necessary because of ERPC’s declining membership.

Finances and Budget

Accounting Change. Change the ERPC accounting base from a per person to a per “giving unit.” “Per person” does not give a good indication of sustainable burden as it is unlikely that a man, woman, and children in a family contribute separately, they contribute as a family, which can be considered “1”-giving-unit.

Budget. The budget should be detailed enough so that costly items are listed as subcategories. Also, a percentage of ERPC income should be saved in dedicated pocket savings accounts for these subcategories. The budget should account for every dollar in the church, including special donations given for Mission and Outreach, Deacons funds, or any specialty item. The church has a procedure for reallocating dedicated funds should the need arise. It is difficult to make financial decisions or reallocate funds if some funds are hidden. The Deacon and operational Outreach and Mission budget seems to overlay. Clarity on how these budgetary efforts deviate or complement each other might be helpful. Knowing how these budgets interact seems warranted particularly as operational costs escalate.

Learning and Christian Education

Place a greater emphasis on children and youth *over adults* in the funding and staffing of Christian Education.

Conflict Resolution

Identify resources for involving an outside mediator to resolve future church conflicts.

Looking Toward the Future

Suggest revising how the annual committee and Session reports are prepared and presented. Currently, reports only present actions completed. These reports should be restructured to identify what is being planned for the coming year and how the proposed changes/actions will be implemented. Timelines for achieving these actions should be included and note whether the previous year’s planned actions were successful or accomplished.

Empower our congregation by having follow-up town hall meetings and surveys with prompt congregational distribution of summary/reports, ideally prior to an annual congregational meeting.

New Pastor. Townhall meetings and questionnaires to the congregation indicate they recognize a need to change and to grow. However, membership is also wonderfully comfortable with current practices. Stagnant membership indicates current actions are not promoting growth. Change is exceedingly difficult to achieve without turmoil in the population that is experiencing the change. Also change in an organization’s vision/direction is exceedingly difficult and will require strong leadership skills. The new pastor should demonstrate the ability to converse with

and be accepting of a wide range of nationalities, ages, and varieties of people. Regional demographics show a much wider range of ages and nationalities than exist in the current congregation.

The new pastor should have the ability to engage with the current membership, to integrate new church attendees into the congregation, support the church's mission activities, encourage fellowship, and be willing to implement new ideas.

APPENDICES

Links to the appendices are on the Eagle River Presbyterian Church, Alaska website at: erpresbyterian.org

